THE DREISER NEWSLETTER

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THE DREISER CENTENNIAL

Plans are going forward on the centennial celebration of Dreiser's birth here in Terre Haute, and though things are still a bit tentative and some last-minute changes may be necessary, we are able to report to you at this time concerning all that is being contemplated to make the celebration a genuine success.

The main festival days will be August 17 and 18. Participants who have so far agreed to a spot on our program include Dr. Vera Dreiser, psychologist for the California Institution for Women, daughter of Edward M. Dreiser and niece of Theodore; Tedi Dreiser, daughter of Vera, a professional West Coast entertainer who studied at Juilliard; Miss Marguerite Tjader, the very old friend of Dreiser's who helped him with *The Bulwark* and has written *Theodore Dreiser: A New Dimension*; Ruth Epperson Kennell, another old friend of Dreiser's, who has written *Dreiser and the Soviet Union*; Dr. Richard Lehan, author of *Theodore Dreiser: His World and His Novels*; Dr. Charles Shapiro, co-editor, with Alfred Kazin, of *The Stature of Theodore Dreiser* and author of *Theodore Dreiser: Our Bitter Patriot*; Dr. Ellen Moers, author of *Two Dreisers*; Dr. Philip L. Gerber, author of *Theodore Dreiser*; Professor John J. McAleer, author of *Theodore Dreiser: An Introduction and Interpretation*; Dr. Jack Salzman of Long Island University, whose latest work on Dreiser has appeared in the *Journal of Modern Literature*; Dr. Neda Westlake, curator of the Dreiser Collection at the University of Pennsylvania; Professor Rolf Lundēn of the University of Uppsala, Sweden, who is currently working on "The Anithetic Pattern of Dreiser's Art"; Dr. Imogene B. Dickey of North Texas State University, who has made a special study of Dreiser's feminine portrayals; Miss Barbara Townsend, of Ball State University, who has made a study of Dreiser's childhood experiences as they relate to his literary production; and Professor David Griffiths of the Department of French at the University of Victoria in British Columbia.

Some of these, like Professor Griffiths, will simply be meeting with and talking with people informally at our reception. Others, such as Dr. Salzman, Dr. Westlake, Professor Lunden, Dr. Dickey, and Miss Townsend will address our workshop

only [*see below*], but will also be at the reception; still others will participate in the main program, as shown in the box at the end of this article.

Professor Maxwell Geismar, whose work *Mark Twain: An American Prophet* is considered by many to be "the last word" on this great American and who wrote about Dreiser in *Rebels and Ancestors* has tentatively said "No" -- but we are still hoping to persuade him. Still to be heard from is Professor Yasen Nikoliavich Zassursky of the University of Moscow, the leading Dreiser scholar of the Soviet Union, who has also been invited. Some others, such as Professor Robert Forrey of San Diego State College, have made suggestions, but no real commitments.

The workshop, which offers two credits and which will generally survey Dreiser's life and work, will be conducted on both a graduate and undergraduate level from August 9 through August 20, under the leadership of Dr. Richard Dowell and myself. Enrollments are still open,* and guests are cordially welcome to come to hear the workshop speakers on the main festival days. Those desiring to speak to the workshop on August 16 or 19 should contact Dr. Dowell or myself.

We hope to conduct tours of Terre Haute, with special reference to Theodore Dreiser and Paul Dresser, for all participants and guests on both August 17 and 18. A book display will appear in a corner of the room during our panel and the following informal reception. All books displayed will be available at the University Bookstore, and we are urging their authors to make themselves available for autographing. Terre Haute libraries are being urged to make Dreiser book displays also.

All guests are urged to attend the banquet, and those planning to do so should send $6.00 by July 12 to the Conference Bureau, Indiana State University, Terre Haute, Indiana 47809.

* Write Dr. Harriet Darrow, Director of Summer Sessions, Indiana State University, Terre Haute, Indiana 47809 for enrollment information.

A special memorial stamp in honor of Theodore Dreiser has been requested from the Post Office Department. We are hoping the decision will be made in time for us to announce it at the banquet. Also to be announced at the banquet will be the winners of a statewide contest sponsored by the Indiana Council of Teachers of English for the best high-school papers on the work of Dreiser. We hope other states will conduct similar contests.

I wish to thank my committee, particularly Dr. Richard Dowell, Associate Chairman; Miss Jane Schnabel, Publicity Chairman; and our department head, Dr. George Smock, for their co-operation. Also serving on the committee are Dr. James Richard Bash and Dr. Joseph Schick, whose suggestions have proved valuable.

More details will be on our brochure, currently being prepared. If you want one, please write to me or to Dr. Dowell, in care of the Department of English, Indiana State University, Terre Haute, Indiana 47809. If you do not plan to drive, I suggest you write the Chamber of Commerce of Terre Haute, 631 Cherry Street, for a listing of motels that are close-in. Hotel reservations are not available. And feel free to write to Dr. Dowell or myself concerning any special problems.

--Robert P. Saalbach
Chairman, Dreiser Centennial Committee

Centennial Program

Tuesday, August 17:

11-11:50 a.m. -- Dr. Ellen Moers: Dreiser and His Age

2-3:50 p.m. -- Panel Discussion: Dreiser's Social Philosophy: The Writer, the "Equities," and the Communist Party.

Moderator: Robert P. Saalbach. Participants: Mrs. Ruth Kennell, Miss Marguerite Tjader, Dr. Richard Lehan, and Dr. Charles Shapiro.

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4-5:00 p.m. -- in Panel Discussion Room: Informal Reception for all guests to meet all participants.

7:30-10:00 p.m. -- Special program consisting of songs of Paul Dresser to be sung by Tedi Dreiser, along with two of Theodore Dreiser's poems that have been set to music; and also some selections from the plays of Theodore Dreiser, to be presented by the Theatre Department.

Wednesday, August 18:

1-1:50 p.m. -- Dr. Philip Gerber: Dreiser, Balzac, Zola and Cowperwood (illustrated lecture with slides).

6:30 p.m. -- Dreiser Centennial Dinner, with special souvenir program. Greetings will be extended by Dr. Vera Dreiser. The main speaker will be Professor John J. McAleer: "Dreiser and Capote: Turning Case History into Art."

WORKSHOP SPEAKERS:

Tuesday, August 17: 10-10:50 a.m. -- Dr. Neda Westlake: "The Dreiser Collection at the University of Pennsylvania"

1-1:50 p.m. -- Dr. Jack Salzman: "Dreiser's Position in the History of American Literature"

Wednesday, August 18: 2:00-2:50 p.m. -- Professor Rolf Lunden: "The Antithetic Pattern of Dreiser's Art"

Also from 10 to 11:50 a.m. Wednesday, all participants in the main program will be available for questions and answers, along with the above workshop-speakers. Others who will address the workshop will do so on August 16 and 19. If guests can come early or stay over, they should write about the possibility of hearing these speakers. Address the Dreiser Centennial Committee, either through the Chairman or Associate Chairman.

A Tragedy Ballad

In April 1970 my seminar in "Dreiser and Naturalism" was treated to a student report of the crime on which Dreiser based his *Tragedy*. From contemporary newspaper accounts and the like, the scenes Dreiser used -- with their similarities and alterations -- emerged clearly, including the *modus operandi* of the deed itself and the county-fair atmosphere of the trial (Roberta's letters hawked in cheap printings, etc.). Of special interest was the reporter's interview with Mrs. Grace Darling, now a resident of Rochester, New York, but once a girlhood neighbor of Grace Brown. At the next seminar meeting, another member, Mrs. Jean Gravelle, whose Master's thesis is an edition of newly-found songs and ballads, contributed copies of a ballad [see page 6] unearthed during her folklore research.

Mrs. Gravelle remarks: Considering the tremendous excitement generated by the Grace Brown - Chester Gillette tragedy among the inhabitants of the Adirondack area where it occurred, it is not surprising that one of them composed a ballad about it. Many ballads on sensational crimes have become widespread, but this one would probably never have been recorded had it not been for Harold W. Thompson, a Professor at the State College in Albany and Cornell University. Thompson had his folklore students collect materials from all parts of the state, some of which he published in 1939 in *Body, Boots and Britches*. "The Ballad of Grace Brown and Chester Gillette" (p. 444) was transcribed by a student from a version "sung at Gloversville by a former woodsman." This is all that is known, apparently, concerning its origin, but Thompson does note that it recalls the crime "which the genius of Theodore Dreiser had celebrated." Mrs. Gravelle adds: "In the *Tragedy* not even Clyde knew it all!"

-- *Philip L. Gerber*
Department of English
SUNY, Brockport

The Ballad of Grace Brown and Chester Gillette

The dreams of the happy is finished,
The scores are brought in at last;
A jury has brought in its verdict,
The sentence on Gillette is passed.

Two mothers are weeping and praying;
One praying that justice is done,
The other one asking for mercy,
Asking God to save her dear son.

All eyes are turned on the drama,
A-watching the press night and day,
A-reading those sweet pleading letters,
Wondering what Gillette would say.

He is now in State's Auburn dark prison
Where he soon will give up his young life,
Which might have been filled with sweet sunshine
Had he taken Grace Brown for his wife.

But Cupid was too strong for Gillette,
It was playing too strong with his heart,
For the one that had loved him so dearly,
Yet from her he wanted to part.

'Twas on a hot, sultry day in the summer
When the flowers were all aglow,
They started out on their vacation
For the lakes and the mountains to roam.

Did she think when he gathered those flowers
That grew on the shores of the lake
That the hands that plucked those sweet lilies
Her own sweet life they would take?

It happened along in the evening,
Just at the close of the day,
With the one that had loved him so dearly
They drifted along on South Bay.

They were out of the view of the people
Where no one could hear her last call,
And nobody knows how it happened,
But Gillette and God knows it all.

The Rocking Chair Structure of Sister Carrie

In an era when practically every home was equipped with a rocking chair, Theodore Dreiser easily and fortunately fell upon the simple device he needed to focus and dramatize the deepening pathos as he traced the crucial points in the lives of his two principal characters in *Sister Carrie* (1900). Indeed, Dreiser himself was accustomed to seeking out a rocker for serious contemplation; he mentioned in his autobiography that during his newspaper days a rocking chair in the nearest hotel lobby was his "favorite cure for despondent days."[1] The rocking chair was commonplace at every economic level in 1900, and Dreiser used it at all levels, placing it among the opulent furnishings of Carrie's sanctuary in New York and even in Hurstwood's last den of parsimony. In order to emphasize the creature discomfort of George Hurstwood and Carrie Meeber without slipping into melodrama, he needed an inconspicuous, yet familiar device. The repetitive use of the rocker in numerous scenes throughout the novel is subtle yet most effective in demonstrating the anxiety and disappointment endured by these two as they pursue that elusive fugitive known as satisfaction.

With each successive rocking scene, Dreiser increased the emotional tempo, and at the same time provided the reader with an episodical summary of the previous action. Further, the plot of *Sister Carrie* is structured around these rocking scenes to the extent that their sequence accurately traces the entire plot of the novel. Such scenes embody the essence of Dreiser's purpose here: to show the dreadful and painful frustration brought on by not succeeding in life, especially for those who look for happiness in wealth. This frustration is suffered vicariously by each character, and Dreiser most frequently and adroitly portrays their suffering by placing his characters in a rocking chair. In the novel every rocking scene follows an external incident which in some way disrupts the movement of either Hurstwood or Carrie in their pursuit of satisfaction. Following Dreiser's own habit, they seek out the nearest rocker for solace when despondent over the way life is dealing with them.

In "the one small rocking-chair"[2] by the window, Carrie first shivers with disappointment from her first touch with reality. Being confronted with the austerity of her sister's

flat in Chicago after her dreams of splendor had been enhanced by her meeting with Drouet, she begins to realize her dismal station in life. The glimpse of wealth she catches deepens her frustration because she is not a part of it. After securing her first job in a shoe factory at a disappointing $4.50 per week, Carrie rocks and wonders how it will suffice to fulfill her dreams of having fine clothes (p. 28). Trading her virginity for warm and beautiful clothes, she moves in with Drouet. She feels contented until she meets one of Drouet's friends, Hurstwood. His material burnish surpasses anything that Drouet can offer, and Carrie again sits down in the rocker by the window to ask herself the recurring question as to whether she is truly happy in her present state (p. 91). The contrast of wealth against poverty never ceased to impress Dreiser, and Carrie is similarly impressed and frustrated: "The glow of the palatial doors was still in her eye, the roll of the cushioned carriages still in her ears. What, after all, was Drouet? What was she? At her window, she thought it over, rocking to and fro, and gazing out across the lamp-lit park toward the lamp-lit houses on Warren and Ashland Avenues. She was too wrought up to care to go down to eat, too pensive to do aught but rock and sing" (p. 101). She rocks and dreams on three more occasions before she deserts Drouet for Hurstwood, who by now already represents the answer to all her dreams. First, after agreeing to take a part in an Elks' play, she rocks and dreams of fame and fortune (p. 135). Her subsequent dramatic performance augments Hurstwood's infatuation for her, and he solicits her affections in Drouet's absence. Her frustration mounts as she cannot decide between the security of Drouet and the urbanity of Hurstwood. Again she suffers in the rocking chair (p. 185). The tension tightens when Drouet learns of Hurstwood's interest in Carrie and of her acquiescence. Piqued by Drouet's accusations, she wants to leave him, but she only acts vicariously in the rocker (p. 193). Unsure of her tenure with Drouet and also not completely trustful of Hurstwood's sincerity, she rocks and worries.

The Hurstwood phase of Carrie's life is similar to her previous one with Drouet. Commencing with a rocking scene in the hotel room in Montreal (p. 234)--where she and Hurstwood have fled after the theft--in which she weighs the prudence of her recent gambit, she becomes optimistic over her present state by the time they are settled in New York. But their flat soon grows "commonplace" and her life with Hurstwood humdrum when she espies the wealth and splendor of Broadway. "She longed to feel the delight of parading here as an equal" (p. 260). Thus re-awakened, these feelings "dwelt in her mind

and occupied her consciousness during many long afternoons in which her rocking-chair and her latest novel contributed the only pleasures of her state" (p. 261). The pleasant experience of dinner in one of Broadway's luxurious restaurants is aptly contrasted for Carrie when she returns to her dull flat to find Hurstwood dozing away. Unable to enter the bedroom, she seeks the rocking chair in the dining room. "She was rocking and beginning to see" (p. 273).

It is here that the two fortunes actually intersect: Carrie lifts herself out of the rocker for awhile, and Hurstwood sits down to rock. One economic disappointment after another causes Hurstwood with increasing frequency to seek the ease of the rocking chair. As Philip Gerber has described him, "In the steady ebb and flow of the chair's repeated motion, he finds an opium dream of security."[3] After losing the "Warren Street Place" and failing to secure a managerial position in another establishment, Hurstwood entertains the idea of serving as a bartender. But the image of an "ex-manager" falling to the status of a mere waiter is humiliating and repulsive to him; so he only returns home to rock (p. 288).

His economic slide is poignantly depicted in subsequent rocking sessions (pp. 291, 316). And the decreasing measure of Carrie's affection for him is directly proportionate to his decreasing wealth. While she enjoys herself as Carrie "Madenda" on the stage, Hurstwood's only activity at this point is rocking in his familiar chair and waiting up for her (p. 333). As her theatrical career gradually improves, she sees their flat as a pit of penury and depression; Hurstwood himself is plunged more deeply into despondency, and he seeks the rocking chair. "It was a sitting place for Hurstwood. He sat and rocked, rocked and read, enveloped in the gloom of his own fate. October went by, and November. It was the dead of winter almost before he knew it, and there he sat" (p. 335). As John McAleer suggests, the motion of the rocker becomes a surrogate for Hurstwood's active pursuit of the American Dream and his newspaper a window through which he can now merely observe--not compete with--those caught up in life.[4] Feeling himself down but not completely out, he takes a job as a scab during a streetcar strike. But the show of violence overshadows his fear of eventual starvation, and he scampers back to the flat and his "comfortable rocking-chair" (p. 356). The sheer pathos of these scenes is dramatically effective; we are presented with the figure of a desperate creature rocking to escape the cruel external realities of this world.

There are subsequent rocking scenes of equal pathos which effectively reflect Hurstwood's plight (pp. 361, 365). After observing his final fitful rest in the rocking chair--in which he discovers that Carrie had fled--the reader follows him down the back streets of New York as he succumbs to his fate. The narrative eventually returns to Carrie, who is shown in another rocker unhappy after reaching her material apex. Supported by the familiar chair--which at this point in the novel poignantly represents the futility of life for both of them--she is perplexed by her state of mind (p. 404). She reviews recent advice to alter her dramatic course in order to make her talents "valuable to others," but her egoistical drive prevents her from absorbing this idea, and she suffers for it. In the scene following Hurstwood's suicide, amidst the material glitter she had once craved, Dreiser pictures her as a frustrated woman. "In her rocking-chair she sat, singing and dreaming" (p. 416). It is appropriate that in the final scene of the novel she is presented in this vehicle of painful recollection. This is certainly Dreiser's most lucid comment on his materialistic world: "In your rocking-chair, by your window dreaming, shall you long, alone. In your rocking-chair, by your window, shall you dream such happiness as you may never feel" (p. 418).

The profundity of the novel has been dramatically visualized in the quiet of the rocking chair, and the sequence of these rocking scenes has conveyed an overview of the entire plot. The subject matter of the novel has concerned two helpless victims tossed up and down and around till they have repeatedly landed in a rocking chair, and their agony is most effectively dramatized as they rock and dream and wonder what went wrong. Using such a simple device for his stage property, Dreiser has focused the attention of his readers relentlessly on the power of material things to betray the essential spirit as the wellspring of happiness.

--*Jerome M. Loving*
Duquesne University
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

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[1]*A Book About Myself: Newspaper Days* (New York, 1922), pp. 120, 190.

[2]Theodore Dreiser, *Sister Carrie*, ed. Claude Simpson (Boston, 1959), p. 115. All subsequent references to the primary source are taken from this edition.

[3]*Theodore Dreiser* (New York, 1964), p. 63.

[4]*Theodore Dreiser: An Introduction and Interpretation* (Boston, 1968), pp. 91, 89.

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Airmail Interview: RICHARD LEHAN

Richard Lehan, Professor of English at UCLA, received his Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin, where he also taught from 1953 to 1957. In 1958 he moved to the University of Texas, where he remained until 1962, the year he joined the UCLA faculty. Besides his book *Theodore Dreiser: His Work and His Novels* (1969), Lehan has published *F. Scott Fitzgerald and the Craft of Fiction* (1966) and numerous articles on recent American, British, and French fiction. He is also coeditor of *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* and on the advisory board of *Twentieth-Century Literature* and the bibliography committee of *American Literature*.

Concerning *Theodore Dreiser: His Work and His Novels*, the *Times Literary* Supplement (January 1, 1971) recently wrote: ". . . his excellent study . . . does much to resolve the paradox that Dreiser, in spite of his philosophical confusion and self-contradiction, is still a major novelist. Lehan does this by linking key facts in Dreiser's biography, his ideas, and the novels themselves, in a lucid and scholarly structure of argument."

Lehan advises the *DN* that he is presently at work "on a study which traces and analyzes transitions in American literature from the Gilded through the Jazz down to the Modern age."

We hear it asserted, not infrequently, that Dreiser the artist clashes with the thinker. Supposing this to be so, to what extent does such a clash weaken his novels?

I do not think the question states the true problem. I believe that Dreiser the thinker is often inconsistent, usually because he did not reconcile the conflicting elements within his own experience. For example, he never reconciled his sense of beauty with his desire for money, and a character like Eugene Witla is both contemplative and restless in a world that is at once beautiful and cruel. In *An American Tragedy* the description of Big Bittern reveals this double view of nature. In the fiction these ideas are not inconsistent but reinforce some of the main themes of the novels, particularly in *An American Tragedy* the theme of life as opposed forces and the theme of the double.

Dreiser was unable to reconcile his own romantic aspirations with his belief in a world of physical limits. As we all know, he worked hard for social change, but he believed that man was the victim of an environment over which he had no control. As a romantic, he believed that it was possible for one to pursue an idealized self. As a Spencerian naturalist and later mechanist, he also believed that one functioned within prescribed limits. While Dreiser himself was able to break from his impoverished family and become a high-priced, successful writer, he theoretically maintained that this kind of experience was improbable if not impossible. While his ideas cannot be philosophically reconciled, they lead in his fiction to what I have called "the displaced character," someone like Clyde Griffiths, for example, whose desire for self-fulfillment is in conflict with his heredity and environment. Clyde believes that he is an independent creature of free will, but he is a victim of his own nervous system, his family background, small-town morality, the political ambitions of both prosecuting and defense attorneys, and of the "psychic" forces at work in nature itself. Dreiser's philosophical inconsistency is the source here of narrative conflict, a kind of tension which leads to the novel's many ironies. Clyde, for example, believes in his ability to get money and live a "pagan" life; yet he is finally condemned by his lack of money and moral conventions. Dreiser gives the screw another ironic turn when Rev. McMillan fails to tell the governor that Clyde is legally innocent of murder because McMillan believes that Clyde is morally guilty of murder, that he "had murder in his heart."

The examples could be multiplied, but the main point would remain the same. Dreiser's novels are not expository tracts, and Dreiser's philosophical inconsistencies do not really blemish his novels. Indeed, the opposite is true when the conflict in Dreiser the man becomes the source of dramatic conflict in his use of character, setting, and plot.

Have recent attempts to establish Dreiser as a novelist of "finesse" been successful? For example, can an undergraduate be persuaded by a non-specialist instructor that Sister Carrie or An American Tragedy are excellent works of art as well as significant cultural documents?

Once again, I think the question slightly misstates the problem. I think that most serious readers of fiction, whether they be undergraduates or professors of English, have to recognize that there are novels and novels. The trouble comes when we try to compare *Sister Carrie* or *An American Tragedy* with *The Portrait of a Lady*, *Ulysses*, or *Invisible Man*. I do not think that such comparisons are very profitable. What point can be can be served in condemning a Dreiser novel for not being what it never intended to be? A teacher would need to admit at the outset that a Dreiser novel does not have the international scope or moral dimension of a James novel; it does not have the symbolic overlay and interior consciousness of a Joyce novel; it does not treat topical problems with the comic symbolism of Ellison's *Invisible Man*. I think, however, it is meaningful to compare *An American Tragedy* to Richard Wright's *Native Son*, which is largely supported by undergraduate readers, and to show these same undergraduates how Dreiser handled roughly the same kind of story, but handled it with far more complexity than did Wright. I think one could also compare *Jennie Gerhardt* with Erich Segal's *Love Story*, admittedly a bad novel, and show in what way Dreiser better realized the possibilities of the poor-girl-meets-rich-boy experience.

I do think that the real value of a novel is probably decided a generation or two after it is written, when its mere topical appeal is no longer with us and when we can see if the work is complex enough to speak beyond its immediate moment. I think Dreiser's novels and stories stand this kind of test, concerned as they are with the meaning of the family, with the terrible gulf between rich and poor, with the idea of success in America, with the effects of moral and social conventions, with the plight of women in America, with the dynamics of power, and with the very process of change. These problems are as much with us now as they were when

Dreiser was writing, and I am quite convinced that Dreiser's work is still "relevant," to focus upon that all-consuming concern of the undergraduate today.

The most serious complaint against Dreiser's novels is usually directed at matters of technique. I must admit that Dreiser's novels succeed despite and not because of his style. The force of his novels comes through a kind of "repetitive form," an incremental progression, which has a logic of its own. Dreiser was not as careless a novelist as some critics have maintained. This is what I tried to prove in my 1963 article on *An American Tragedy* and what Miss Moers demonstrated in her article on *Sister Carrie*.

When all is considered, I do think that *Sister Carrie* and *An American Tragedy* are "excellent" in their own right, to answer the question directly. I think, however, excellence is a relative matter. As I have explained above and as I tried to suggest in my "Assessing Dreiser" (*DN*, Fall 1970), I believe that every novel uses a pattern of experience that is extrinsic to the work itself and that it is most critically profitable to compare and contrast works that are treating the same general kind of experience. In this contest, I think that both *Sister Carrie* and *An American Tragedy* are classics of their kind.

In your book, you indicate that "When self-fulfillment is at stake, Dreiser's characters have no compassion, consider themselves privileged and destined, and are as ruthless as any robber baron" (p. 125). Would you agree that the numerous estrangements in Dreiser's own life argue a similar ruthlessness? Do you feel that he was as successful artistically when he dealt with characters that lacked the instinct for self-advancement, such as Jennie Gerhardt?

I do believe that a good deal of Dreiser the man went into his conception of character. His stories are, first of all, very personal. They deal with the pathetic plight of his own family: Emma (*Sister Carrie*), Mame and Sylvia (*Jennie Gerhardt*, himself (*The "Genius"*). And when he was writing about Cowperwood or Clyde Griffiths these characters ended up as much like himself as they did Charles Yerkes or Chester Gillette, upon whom they were modeled. The first draft of *An American Tragedy*, for example, recounts the history of Dreiser's father and mother more than it does of Chester Gillette. Moreover, I believe that Dreiser's own obsessive fear of death-by-drowning gave the Grace Brown-Chester Gillette story even greater allure.

What is interesting in such a novel is that Clyde often does himself what he condemns others for doing. For example, he condemns the man who leaves his sister when she is pregnant, and he condemns Hortense Briggs for being indifferent to his love, when in a matter of time he is going to treat Roberta far worse than anyone ever treated him. Dreiser himself could be morally outraged at behavior that was not beyond him.

As the question suggests, *Jennie Gerhardt* is different from other Dreiser novels. Here Dreiser was reacting to the shabby way his sisters were treated. Jennie is the most innocent of all his youthful characters, the least ambitious, the least cunning, the least deserving of her fate. Dreiser saved the novel from becoming soap opera, but Jennie's lack of "instinct for self-advancement" made her more a victim of cruel circumstance and also made her story less interesting than Sister Carrie's.

In your article "Assessing Dreiser" (DN, Fall 1970) you state that The Bulwark is "simply third-rate." Do you feel the weakness grows out of Dreiser's having changed his mind about the role of Solon Barnes?

I think so, but of course any argument, pro or con here, is a matter of conjecture. As I pointed out in the previous answer, Dreiser's stories were deeply personal, and this was also true of *The Bulwark*. Dreiser was deeply moved when in 1912 Anna Tatum told him the story of her family. Dreiser saw in what ways the story related to his own family: the authoritarian father, the wayward children, the push and pull between the two as the old moral values gave way in an amoral, secular world. When Dreiser abandoned *The Bulwark* in 1919 or slightly later and turned to *An American Tragedy*, he was moving to a very similar story--similar, that is, in the emotional meaning it had for him. When he returned to the idea more than thirty years after Anna Tatum spoke with him about her father, I think the dynamics of this kind of story had lost much of its meaning for him. Dreiser was then an old man himself and his sympathies were more with Solon Barnes than they had ever been before. Moreover, in *The Bulwark* Dreiser was intent upon discussing the process of change, also a main subject of concern in "Notes on Life." The novel rather tediously labored his belief that one was born to die, that seasons changed, and that civilizations prospered and decayed. All life moved in a circle, was in continuous motion, going nowhere. The universe had a limited amount of matter and was forever changing, diminishing and then replenishing itself. The individual came and went, never fully understanding

his short experience on earth, a fact that kept life mysterious and led to a sense of awe in the face of the unknown. Perhaps the real difference between Sister Carrie's restlessness and Solon's final peace was the difference between Dreiser's early thirst for experience and fame and his final sense of tired commitment. This leads to the stoic attitude that provides the link between Solon Barnes and the Frank Algernon Cowperwood of *The Stoic*. Solon is a good man in a world becoming totally corrupt. Unlike Clyde, who blindly cooperates on a process of events that bring him to an end he is trying to avoid, Solon is more like Jennie Gerhardt, the innocent victim of circumstances. His story is more pathetic than tragic, a narrative condition that I personally feel would not be true if Dreiser had written the novel in 1912 or soon after.

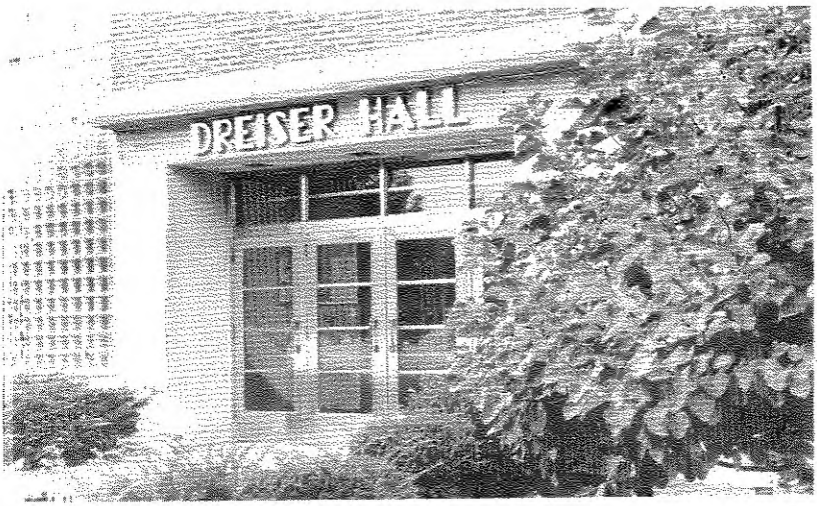
A reader in India reports that Dreiser is much admired for the "mystic humanism" revealed particularly in his last two novels. There seems to be considerably less notice of this in America. Are we missing something of pertinence--or is India finding more in Dreiser than actually exists?

I think there is a good deal of confusion on this point. The closest we come to "mystic humanism" in Dreiser is with Berenice Fleming in *The Stoic*. She is "absorbed in Brahma," washed free of "self" and desire, and able to dedicate her life to others. Dreiser obviously departed here from his earlier belief in pure mechanism. However, if we read *The Bulwark* and *The Stoic* carefully, particularly in conjunction with "Notes on Life," we see that while Dreiser was willing to postulate in his last years a Creative Intelligence, he also insisted that his Intelligence was working to complete itself and did not have the good of man in mind. Solon comes to this conclusion when he sees a green fly eating a beautiful flower at the end of *The Bulwark*. Together Berenice and Cowperwood embody two themes that had existed in Dreiser's thinking from his *Ev'ry Month* days, when he would describe the joys of the rich and the plight of the poor, attack the robber barons and applaud Clarence Lexow. In his early work, the struggle between desire and contentment often went on within the individual; in his later work, it went on within the Creative Intelligence. Dreiser never escaped his own immense ego; he merely projected it into the heavens and gave it cosmic meaning, and the earlier dualities still remained in Dreiser's late writing. Thus, while *The Stoic* offers syncretistic resolution to thematic extremes, the novel functions in terms of these extremes--in terms of

Cowperwood's restlessness and Berenice's final peace. Just as one cannot separate Carrie's "rise" from Hurstwood's "fall," or separate Cowperwood's rise in *The Financier* and *The Titan* from his fall in *The Stoic*, so one must see Berenice's spiritualism in contrast to Cowperwood's materialism. Dreiser still believed in the mechanistic push and pull of opposites, that we could not have love without hate, beauty without ugliness, life without death, desire without resignation. We sometimes forget that Dreiser's three novels are subtitled *A Trilogy of Desire*, and the mechanics of desire involve both Berenice and Cowperwood. This does not add up to "mystic humanism."

[Next issue's interviewee is Marguerite Tjader Harris, author of *Theodore Dreiser: A New Dimension*, and co-editor with John J. McAleer of an edition of Dreiser's "Notes on Life," now in progress. Readers are invited to address questions they might have for Miss Tjader to the editors of *DN*. All queries should be received by 1 August 1971. --*The Editors*]

DREISER HALL



Built in 1950, Dreiser Hall is a three-story structure serving the Departments of English, Humanities, Philosophy and Speech at Indiana State University. In addition to regular classrooms, the building has a 300-seat playhouse, and the University's radio and television studios. The structure was known as the Language-Mathematics Building until 1966, when it was renamed Dreiser Hall in honor of Terre Haute's native son.

Review: DREISER'S POETRY

Selected Poems From Moods By Theodore Dreiser, ed. Robert Palmer Saalbach. New York: Exposition Press, 1969. 254 pp., $7.50.

Most major novelists have shied away from committing the hubris of arrogating to themselves another form. A conspicuous few have longed to be remembered as poets too. Scott, Thackeray, Emily Bronte, Melville, Hardy, Stephen Crane, Faulkner, Warren, and Updike come to mind. Yet the poetry of a great novelist usually seems like velvet shed from the antlers of some massive moose--a greening touch in its season, but non-essential to his basic well-being. One wonders--if its author did not have his reputation as novelist to call attention to it, would such poetry be read at all? Publication of 160 of the best of the 502 known poems of Theodore Dreiser--a part of Dreiser's achievement which scholarship hitherto has been content to inventory parenthetically--creates a perfect moment to put the familiar view of novelists' poetry under scrutiny, to find out whether it is, after all, like nun's poetry, a kind of spiritual phlegm, of no particular value to anyone other than its originator.

Edgar Lee Masters serenaded Dreiser as "Theodore the Poet." Ellen Moers relates that Dreiser, from the outset of his career, wanted to be a poet, and, indeed, she argues persuasively that his maturity as a novelist is allied with his eventual realization that realism without poetry is sterile. A bard of becoming, Dreiser does not submit well to disciplined poetic forms. Robert Saalbach has not even bothered to include Dreiser's sonnets. They are botchy work, at best. It is as unshackled mystic, imagist, and transcendentalist that he seems best to pipe his thoughts to us, in flute-like lyricism. Joy of being, love of beauty, a world of hope for man, are themes he cherishes. Yet, as Professor Saalbach insists, the aspiring side of Dreiser's nature could not free itself of a vision of a mechanistic universe. He would not acquiesce to it but, like our galaxy, which moves always enveloped in its sac of hydrogen, Dreiser dwelt always in a solution of anguish visible. Again and again he makes Ashcan School encroachments on the sordid world of reality, and some of the most startling poems in this collection belong to that category--"Flaherty Junction," "Geddo Street," "The Bad House," "Beyond the Track." Yet there is always a sense of a sanative Nature fondling the margins of that world--"Yet high in the blue/A strong hawk/not being 'dead'/Sails." Dreiser never relented in his hope for man. He wanted for him a benevolent universe.

"If in my harsh youth,/but one, but one,/had aided me," Dreiser laments in "Moon Moth." Yet he is personal only in the sense that he touches intimately on what is in the recesses of the hearts of all men. Habitually he transcends the immediate. The individual vanishes into the larger concern for man's welfare and destiny. His "You" and "I" are, in their turn, Everyman. A record of exclusive grief or joy is not for Dreiser. He may particularize on what is known, but he universalizes on what is felt. Rhetorical questions centering on man's place in the universe are constant. He doesn't merely have an interest in the universe, but true relatedness to it. In denying identity to the self, he relates in brotherhood to all the universe. "Minds...", he says, "play/A Wild obbligato/To the solo of the flesh." Going beyond the physical, he leaps to a confrontation of philosophical ultimates. If intuitions are uncharted tropisms, then what is the sun that draws us to its bidding?

The Upanishads, the Vedas, the Shelley of "Ozymandias," Omar, Hardy, Masters, Yeats--all have left a sense of their presence on these poems. And the men of science--Loeb, Bridges, Jeans. But a corporeal sense of none is so strikingly felt as in the feeling given of Emerson being here in palpable substance. The immediate literary debts--Dreiser's "Brahma," his "Him" (which, as Professor Saalbach notes, also resembles Emerson's "Brahma"), his "Wood-Notes," his lamentation for "The gorgon story/Of the human soul," so reminiscent of Emerson's "Skeptic"--proclaim themselves frankly. More subtle are transcendental correspondences which induce Dreiser to seek always a larger understanding of the immediate. Some of the imagistic passages are reminiscent of Pound and William Carlos Williams--"Cut jonquils in a pale green vase"; "Wet tree-trunks,/Black after a rain,/And those grey racing clouds/That mutter to the south"; "A butterfly/Struck by a pearl of rain,/A silver bullet--/Collides with a wet, pink thistle." Of haiku, too. But Dreiser knew, on Emerson's authority, that metaphors are the matrix of philosophy. Man must redeem himself from society in Nature--"I walk,/And all the ways are keener for my step." Man must regenerate himself through a return to elemental things--"I have made me a garden,/Under the shadow of swords."

Selected Poems is the perfect book to have in an era of Dreiserian plenty. With insufflations of remarkable perception Robert P. Saalbach has wrought a constant winnowing. His sensible, just notes are restrained, chaste, germane without being directive. Each reader may come through them to the

Dreiser he can best perceive. What a chance this selection offers us to see Dreiser riding transcendentalism and mechanism in tandem! What a chance to encounter in brawny, skeletal array, his major themes, to find tributaries to the lyricism of his prose, to see the husks of old commitments drop away, and the tendrils to his growth tenaciously advancing, and to witness the mystic borne out of the weight of his own consciousness to a statement of identity that confirms, at last, a true imperium over self and substance.

--*John J. McAleer*
Boston College

NEWS & NOTES

Robert Penn Warren's *Homage to Dreiser: On the Centennial of His Birth* will be published by Random House on August 27, Dreiser's birthday . . . . A revised edition of Robert Elias's *Theodore Dreiser: An Apostle of Nature* is also forthcoming . . . . Two Dreiser items will appear in the first volume of *PROOF: THE YEARBOOK OF AMERICAN BIBLIOGRAPHICAL AND TEXTUAL STUDIES*, edited by Joseph Katz for the University of South Carolina Press: 1) Donald Pizer's "The Publications of Theodore Dreiser: A Checklist"; and 2) Joseph Katz's "The *'Genius'* Dummy." Reports editor Katz: "Pizer's is the best Dreiser bibliography available. It is a year-by-year record of his books and articles, heavily annotated. It supersedes Orton & MacDonald, having all they include and numerous additional items." Katz recently acquired a copy of the dummy of *The "Genius"* prepared for the use of John Lane's salesman. The dummy has preliminary pages and two chapters of text, all bulked out with blank pages and bound as the first edition. But the preliminary pages and text are not like those in the first edition, thus raising some interesting questions about *The "Genius."* In Katz's article the printed pages in the dummy are reproduced, complete, in facsimile. Katz has also acquired all copies of issues of *Ev'ry Month* beginning with Vol. I, No. 3 through the end of 1899, and says there are plans to publish a facsimile of these during the centenary year . . . . Erwin Palena, whose dissertation concerned Dreiser's use of symbolic imagery in *An American Tragedy*, is now finishing a book on Dreiser's use of color and myth. Address: 156 W. Sixth St., Oswego, New York.